DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 449 SO 016 083

AUTHOR McGowan, Thomas M.; Godwin, Charles M.
TITLE "Wee Folk" and Citizenship Education: A Rationale.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (64th, Washington, DC, November 15-19, 1984). For related learning activities, see SO 016 084.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Citizenship Education; Cognitive Processes; Course Content; *Curriculum Development; Decision Making; Educational Needs; *Experiential Learning; Literacy; Primary Education; Problem Solving; Program Effectiveness; Research Skills; Skill Development; *Social Studies

ABSTRACT

Features of an effective citizenship program for primary grade children are discussed. The primary school years are an ideal time to nurture the basic skills and values so important for constructive social decision making. The principal feature of an effective citizenship learning program for young children is an activist, child-centered instructional environment that permits children to investigate and generate rather than to listen and regurgitate. A second necessary feature for an effective program is the selection of content that is relatively familiar to young students. Youngsters should encounter situations that are recognizable and understandable; but at the same time they should not be totally comfortable in these situations. A third feature of an effective citizenship program is a strong emphasis on skills development; research, literacy, interpersonal, problem-solving, and process and thinking skills should be taught. With the development of effective citizenship programs, the social studies community will contribute tremendously to the effort to provide the nation with the generation of informed social decision makers needed in the decades ahead. (PM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Thomas M McGowan
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED252449

"WEE FOLK" AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: A RATIONALE

Thomas M. McGowan
Indiana State University

Charles M. Godwin
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

SO 016 083

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (64th, Washington, DC, November 15-19, 1984).

"WEE FOLK" AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: A RATIONALE

Thomas M. McGowan
Department of Elementary/
Early Childhood Education
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, Indiana 47809

Charles M. Godwin
Center for Curriculum
and Instruction
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska 68588

America faces myriad challenges in the years beyond 1984. To resolve the social, economic, and political issues that will test this nation in future decades, American society must receive a healthy infusion of informed social decision-makers from its formative generations. A key to meeting the challenges facing America as this century concludes might well be the preparation for social decision-making that these young people experience. Today's young people must acquire the values, skills, and knowledges necessary to act as tomorrow's productive citizens.

In the schools, the social studies plays a crucial role in this citizenship process. Social studies commands the center in an interdisciplinary effort to instill the ability to make informed social judgments in children. Like the nation as a whole, social studies faces challenges as America moves beyond 1984. Foremost among these tasks is the effective transmission of the tools for good citizenship to young people.

Yet, research suggests that social studies educators neglect an essential audience in their citizenship education efforts--children in the primary grades. Studies indicate that primary-level teachers spend little class time for activities that foster qualities demonstrated by the "good" citizen; what few social studies activities that are provided

moreover, consist of passive, teacher-dominated, paper-pencil experiences.[1] Social studies instruction in the primary grades rarely engages young children or affords them opportunity to participate in lively, interactive experiences.[2]

This dearth of active citizenship experiences for small children is particularly discouraging because the primary years seem an ideal time to nurture the basic skills and values so important for constructive social decision-making. The principal feature of an effective citizenship learning program for young children is an "activist", child-centered instructional environment which permits children to investigate and generate rather than to listen and regurgitate. The Early Childhood Advisory Board of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) encourages primary grade teachers to transform their classrooms into laboratories in which children can directly experience the social decision-making process. These early childhood experts argue that an open, participatory school environment is essential for such "real world learning" as citizenship education.[3]

---

[1] Verna S. Fancett and Sharryl Davis Hawke, "Instructional Practices," in Social Studies in the 1980s: A Report of Project SPAN, ed. Irving Morrissett (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1982), p. 67, 70.

[2] Project SPAN Staff, "Six Problems for Social Studies in the 1980s," in Social Studies in the 1980s: A Report of Project SPAN, ed. Irving Morrissett (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1982), p. 83.

[3] Early Childhood Advisory Board, NCSS, Publicizing and Encouraging Elementary Social Studies: Strategies for State and Local Councils, 1983, p. 1.

Other educational theorists echo this call for instructional strategies that permit primary children to learn by doing. Forman and Kushner assume the Piagetian position that children's cognitive development occurs through learning experiences that emphasize discovery and invention. They maintain that learning for the young child is a highly individualistic and intrinsically rewarded process. As a result, Forman and Kuschner recommend episodic "learning encounters" in which youngsters solve problems, structure goals, manipulate inputs, and reflect on their experiences as the optimum teaching strategy for young children.[4] Similarly, the Osborns adopt a Piagetian perspective regarding early childhood learning. These theorists insist, in fact, that activity is a vital part of children's cognitive development. Learning as conceptual and meaningful as citizenship learning, they suggest, cannot be acquired without related activity. The Osborns maintain that knowledges, skills, and values are not passively received, but are actively constructed by the child.[5] In other words, a primary grade teacher should not tell pupils how to be good citizens; rather, the teacher should actively involve students with people, materials, and events that model the essential qualities of citizenship. The work of early childhood theorists strongly suggests that young children cannot be shaped, manufactured, or molded into productive citizens.

---

[4] George E. Forman and David S. Kuschner, The Child's Construction of Knowledge: Piaget for Teaching Children (Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1983), p. 171.

[5] Janie Dyson Osborn and D. Keith Osborn, Cognition in Early Childhood (Athens, GA: Education Associates, 1983), p. 187.

The qualities of "good" citizenship must be generated by the children themselves during interactive, investigative, "doing" experiences.

A second necessary feature of an effective citizenship program for primary grade children is the selection of content that is relatively familiar to them. Theorists have cautioned repeatedly against basing primary-level instruction on information that is completely strange to young children. At the same time, researchers have warned that selecting content that children are completely familar with restricts their learning. Ideally, subject matter for citizenship activities should lie at the edge of children's cognizance and comprehension.[6] These conclusions have implications for the designers of citizenship preparation programs for primary children. Clearly, youngsters should encounter situations that are recognizable and understandable; at the same time, they should not be totally comfortable in these situations. Children can be challenged and stretched by citizenship encounters drawn from smaller, familiar settings (such as the family, the classroom, the school, the neighborhood, and the community). The NCSS' Early Childhood Advisory Board reminds primary teachers that applying citizenship learnings to the nation and world comes much easier once these lessons are understood and appreciated on a smaller scale.[7]

---

[6] Nancy F. Jackson, Halbert B. Robinson, and Philip S. Dale, Cognitive Development in Young Children: A Report for Teachers (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1976), p. 3.

[7] Early Childhood Advisory Board, p. 2.

More specifically, the norms and values inherent in the term "citizenship" are most effectively fostered in primary children through experiences and settings that they recognize. The process of moral growth is not one of imprinting rules and molding children's behavior; rather, moral development entails the transformation of mental structures through a child's constructive interaction with a social environment. Logically, constructive interaction cannot occur unless the child has some awareness of that environment. Such citizenship-related precepts as social responsibility, positive interaction with others, equal opportunity, following rules, and the social worth of every individual can best be conveyed to young children when related to familiar social situations and institutions. Walsh advises that the early years of life are the "golden years" to nurture a lifelong system of values and feelings about the self and other people that is essential for citizenship.[8]

An effective citizenship education program should also feature a strong emphasis on skills development. The Early Childhood Advisory Board of the NCSS insists that primary children need to develop skills that enhance their ability to learn, make social decisions, and become productive contributors to the American society. The board members cite research skills (collecting, organizing, and interpreting information), map and globe skills (the development of spatial relationships), literacy skills, interpersonal skills

---

[8] Huber N. Walsh, Introducing the Young Child to the Social World (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), p. 44.

(seeing other points of view, resolving conflict), and problem-solving skills (considering alternatives, examining consequences) as citizenship competencies deserving emphasis in primary-level citizenship programs.[9] Additionally, the skills of information processing deserve particular emphasis in any citizenship effort in the early years of schooling. Process skills appropriate for small children include classification, seriation, conservation, time-order sequencing, comparing, hypothesizing, drawing conclusions, and making inferences. Cognitively, the early childhood years are a transitional time for small children. Primary children progress from preoperational to operational forms of thinking.[10] To facilitate this cognitive shift, children need opportunities to apply their logic systems to an ever-increasing range of situations. A well-designed citizenship education program affords children chances to exercise new cognitive abilities as they evolve.

A final feature that citizenship education programs for youngsters should demonstrate is related to the development of process/thinking skills. Citizenship efforts should foster a positive attitude toward knowledge and learning in small children.[11] Children should develop a "spirit of inquiry"

---

[9] Early Childhood Advisory Board, p. 2.

[10] Jackson, Robinson, and Dale, pp. 33-35.

[11] Early Childhood Advisory Board, p. 2.

and an interest in knowing more about the world in which they live. Children should engage in experiences that encourage their natural curiosity and make them active, involved, investigative decision-makers. The "good" citizen is a lifelong learner who constantly searches for knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about the future of his/her society. Any primary-level citizenship preparation program should encourage children to take the first step toward a lifetime of learning about their world.

In short, conveying the tools for productive citizenship to young people seems the major challenge facing the social studies community in the years immediately beyond 1984. Research findings indicate, however, that current social studies efforts neglect a crucial target for citizenship preparation--primary grade children. If social studies educators are to meet this challenge, more emphasis need be given to the early childhood years. Small children need opportunities to practice the rudimentary skills, acquire the simple knowledges, formulate the basic values, and develop the attitudes inherent in "good" citizenship. Young children need concerted educational programs that feature active learning experiences with relatively familiar subject matter. With the development of these programs, the social studies community will contribute tremendously to the effort to provide the American nation with the generation of informed social decision-makers so badly needed in the decades ahead.

REFERENCES

Early Childhood Advisory Board, National Council for the Social Studies. Publicizing and Encouraging Elementary Social Studies: Strategies for State and Local Councils. 1983.

Forman, George E., and David S. Kuschner. The Child's Construction of Knowledge: Piaget for Teaching Children. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1983.

Jackson, Nancy Ewald, Halbert B. Robinson, and Philip S. Dale. Cognitive Development in Young Children: A Report for Teachers. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1976.

Morrissett, Irving. ed. Social Studies in the 1980s: A Report of Project SPAN, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1982.

National Society for the Study of Education. The Social Studies. Eightieth Yearbook, Part II, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Osborn, Janie Dyson, and D. Keith Osborn. Cognition in Early Childhood. Athens, GA: Education Associates, 1983.

Ponder, Gerald. "Getting Real: Suggestions for Revising the Social Studies Curriculum." Educational Leadership, 40 (Jan. 1983), pp. 684-688.

Wadsworth, Barry J. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1971.

Walsh, Huber M. Introducing the Young Child to the Social World. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1980.